University Board for Student Media
Annual Report
2014-2015

BOARD MEMBERS

Voting Members

Dr. Erik Ugland Representing Digital Media
Dr. Nathan Gilkerson Representing Strategic Communication
Dr. Pamela Nettleton Representing Journalism and Media Studies
Rev. William Kurz, S.J. Representing Jesuit Faculty
Dr. William Starr Representing College of Arts & Sciences
Mr. Greg Borowski Representing Marquette Alumni
Mr. Dale Kaser Representing Office of the Provost
Mr. Jon Pray Representing Instructional Media Center
Ms. Julie Grace Representing MUSG
Mr. Benjamin Basta Representing MUSG
Mr. Brendan Takash Representing GSO

Non-Voting Members

Ms. Barbara Volbrecht Publications Adviser
Ms. Kimberly Zawada Advertising Adviser
Mr. Joseph Kaiser MU Wire Executive Director
Ms. Rebecca Rebholz Tribune Managing Editor
Ms. Angela Martina Journal Managing Editor
Ms. Claire Kelly WMUR General Manager
Ms. Nina Guzman MUTV General Manager
Ms. Maria Leal Vela Advertising Director

ACTIVITIES

This was an active and at times challenging year for the Board, with many new members, a new chair, some organizational and advising changes in student media, and some extraordinary budget cuts. Nevertheless, the Board succeeded in cutting 24 percent of the student salary budget for next year and made some smaller cuts to the operating budget. It also worked with student leaders to identify some key changes to student media that will begin in fall 2015. The Board also spent some time reevaluating its purposes and structure in light of various changes to student media over the past several years, and developed some preliminary ideas about this, which it hopes to present as formal recommendations to the Academic Senate in the fall.
Board Purposes and Structure

At its first meeting in the fall, the Board discussed the need to reevaluate its purposes and structure in light of the changes that have been made to student media over the past several years. The Board therefore requested that the Academic Senate charge the committee with the task of reassessing its mission, composition and procedures. The Board initiated that discussion this year and the members put forth a number of ideas but the process was not sufficiently complete by the end of the year to send formal recommendations back to the Academic Senate. Board Chair Erik Ugland contacted Senate President Tim Melchert to indicate that this process will carry over into next year.

Preliminary feedback from Board members suggests that they are still committed to the core purposes of the Board that are outlined in its bylaws and further described in the 2007 Student Media Operational Policy. With regard to structure, however, one change many would like to see is a reduction in the size of the Board. It is still important to ensure that key stakeholders are represented, but many Board members believe decision-making would be more nimble and meetings easier to arrange if the Board had fewer members.

Some Board members have also expressed concern about the budget process. The student media budget is currently folded into the budget of the College of Communication, which gives the dean of the college nearly unfettered discretion to determine student media funding levels. The Board has no formal role in that process; it merely manages the funds allocated by the dean. There is also an incentive for the dean to balance the college budget by pulling from student media. Some Board members would like to have at least a consultative relationship with the dean on these issues and others would go further and seek to segregate the student media budget from the college budget.

These are just a couple of the Board members’ initial thoughts on these subjects, but more discussion will be required before the Board is prepared to make formal recommendations to the Academic Senate.

Student Media Advising

Two years ago, the Board worked with the dean of the College of Communication to develop a plan to hire a director of student media who would serve as the adviser for all student media operations. That position was never filled, nor even advertised, because there was no staff line available in the college. That is still the case, unfortunately, so the Board does not expect the position to be filled anytime soon.

The current adviser, Prof. Barbara Volbrecht, has substantial teaching and departmental service responsibilities, so she does not have time to provide the amount of advising support that is needed. As a short-term solution, Dean Lori Bergen in the College of Communication agreed to provide funding to hire several adjunct advisers who would work with the students on an occasional basis, share their expertise, and lead training
sessions/workshops, etc. This program worked well this year and Dean Bergen has agreed to provide funding for its continuation next year. The Board remains hopeful, however, that the college will eventually hire a director of student media.

Student Salary Cuts

As part of Dean Bergen’s 2015-16 budget for the College of Communication, student media was asked to cut $14,000 in operational expenses and $61,000 in student salary – an exceptionally large reduction to absorb in one budget cycle.

With regard to the operating cuts, the Budget Committee did not have trouble finding $14,000 in reductions, in part because of the decision by the Board to move the Marquette Tribune from a twice-weekly to a weekly publication schedule (see more below).

The cuts to student salaries were harder to manage. The $61,000 cut was a 24 percent reduction to the salary budget, so the Budget Committee was forced to reduce student salaries more or less across the board and to combine and eliminate a number of positions. The Board was successful in meeting the budget requirements but there is some concern about how this will impact the quality of student media going forward.

Changes Planned for Marquette Tribune

The most significant decision the Board made during 2014-15 was to change the Marquette Tribune’s publication schedule from twice-weekly to weekly. There does not appear to be substantial demand for a twice-weekly paper and it became taxing on the staff this year to publish twice each week while still managing Marquette Wire.

This change in the publication schedule will help student media accommodate the $14,000 in operating cuts and reduce some of the burden on the students. Saving money was not the only motivation for this change, however. It has some strategic advantages in that the paper can be more of a showcase for students’ best work and it will be less of a forum for deadline-driven material, which will hopefully extend the shelf life of each issue and improve the overall quality. The student media advisers are seeking bids from publishers in the hope of improving the print quality of the paper and the staff is exploring the possibility of moving to a tabloid format (in terms of paper size, not journalistic style), but that is not yet certain.

Election of Student Media Leaders

The full Board met on March 28 to evaluate applications and interview candidates for the leadership positions in student media for 2015-16. Unlike in previous years, the Board only interviewed candidates for the top positions across student media rather than the second-tier positions (section editors, etc.). Those positions were 1) MU Wire Executive Director, 2) Marquette Tribune Managing Editor, 3) Marquette Journal Editor, 4) MUTV General Manager, 5) WMUR General Manager, and 6) Advertising Director. The Board
discussed the possibility of hiring for the position of MU Wire Deputy Director – a position that was not filled in 2014-15 – but a lack of qualified staff members and budget limitations made it impossible for this cycle.

The new student media leaders selected for 2015-16 are:

Andrew Dawson – Wire Executive Director  
James Price – Tribune Managing Editor  
Matthew Kulling – Marquette Journal Editor  
Brian Georgeson – MUTV General Manager  
Laura Noviskis – WMUR General Manager  
Maria Vela – Advertising Director

**BUDGET**

Student media continues to face significant revenue challenges as the market for newspaper advertising continues to decline. The advertising department has sought to diversity its revenue-generating activities by developing new products and services and new forums for advertising, as well as pushing more advertising to the Marquette Wire online. Despite these efforts, revenue was lower again this year. The revenue target for this year was $160,000. The total revenue generated from all sources as of May 1, 2015, was $118,231, with $73,298 coming from the Tribune (print ads), $21,455 from Marquette Living (a website and housing guide connecting renters and property owners), $4,824 coming from Marquette Ink (a custom printing service run by the advertising department), $2,678 coming from the Wire (online ads) and the remainder from some smaller projects.

Although total revenue was down this year, there were some unforeseen and anomalous issues with staffing and training in the advertising department this year that led to fewer sales than expected. The advertising department also has some strategies for 2015-16, including the rollout of phase two (a Marquette-focused classified advertising platform) and three (a student-oriented entertainment directory) of MU Living, which could help increase revenue.

With regard to expenses, there are two broad budget categories: student salaries and operating costs. The salary budget for this year was $256,290, covering payroll for 115 positions. During the 2014-15 academic year, $235,252 was spent with the remaining $20,000+ set aside to pay summer salaries for two employees to work on the redesign of the Tribune and an ad sales person to sell for Marquette Living, the printed housing supplement, and the Tribune.

The total operating budget this year was $97,529, which was used to cover the variable expenses across all of student media. The largest item was the printing of the Tribune, which costs around $45,000 per year, although this should go down next year with the new publication schedule.
BOARD MEMBERSHIP

Dean Lori Bergen appointed Dr. Erik Ugland to the Board as a faculty member representing Digital Media (formerly Broadcast and Electronic Communication), and the Board elected him as chair at its first meeting in the fall. Dr. Pamela Nettleton was selected to serve as a Board member representing Journalism and Media Studies, and Dr. Nathan Gilkerson was chosen as a Board member representing Strategic Communication.

Sadly, the Marquette faculty representative on the Board, Dr. William Starr from Philosophy, passed away in February. Board Chair Erik Ugland and Senate President Tim Melchert decided not to seek an immediate replacement and to leave the position vacant until fall 2015.

The student members of the Board this year were Ms. Julie Grace and Mr. Benjamin Basta, representing MUSG, and Mr. Brendan Takash, representing the GSO.